

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

When you come to Yale College, you join a community of scholars from around the nation and the world. Yale, like every community, has certain values and principles by which it operates. Among the College's most cherished principles is its commitment to freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression is especially important in an academic community, where the search for truth holds a primary value. In 1975, a faculty committee chaired by the late C. Vann Woodward issued the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at Yale, informally called the Woodward Report. This document emphasizes that the history of intellectual growth and discovery demonstrates the need to be able to "think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable, and challenge the unchallengeable." The report acknowledges that such freedom may sometimes make life uncomfortable in a small society such as a college. But it also asserts that "because no other institution combines the discovery and dissemination of basic knowledge with teaching, few need assign such high priority to it."

Yale's commitment to freedom of expression means that, when you agree to matriculate, you join a community where "the provocative, the disturbing, and the unorthodox" must be tolerated. When you encounter people with ideas or positions different from yours, you will be expected to honor their free expression, even when what they have to say seems wrong or offensive to you.

As we honor the right of free expression, we also honor Yale College as a community of teachers and learners who value civility in all their interactions and who maintain a sensitivity to the circumstances and feelings that inform their ideas. It is in a civil and respectful community that freedom of expression can best thrive.

The Woodward Report is a document worth reading in full. More excerpts from it appear in the section on free expression in Yale's *Undergraduate Regulations*.